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## Hanks: Music forges family ties that bind

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By Anna Hanks

Local Contributor

When I saw that the English electronic band Depeche Mode (known for their hit song “People are People”) was going to be to doing their first-ever showcase at the South By Southwest Music Conference and Festival this week, I let out an audible squeal of delight.

Instead of thinking about their lyrics and the possibility of dancing to their music, my first thoughts were of my cousin Nathan.

I’m an only child, but I’m very lucky that my father is very close to his two brothers, both of whom live near him in Houston. Thus, I spent a lot of time with my cousins when I was growing up. They are the closest people I’ll ever have to siblings.

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In the late '70s, my sweet Aunt Susan repeatedly hauled me and several of my cousins to numerous cultural and artistic pursuits, including swimming lessons, bookstores, art classes, baseball games and "The Nutcracker." To transport us to these enlightening experiences, she would pile us into her green Toyota station wagon, with several of us squashed into the back cargo section. There wasn't much room to move around when all of us were in our usual spots in the back!

I was the oldest of the brood, while my cousin Nathan — 18 months younger than me — was the next-oldest. When we were growing up, Nathan was a lot of things that I wasn't. Sometimes it was hard on me because while I was the oldest, he was the far more talented athlete. He was also a solid piano player (his mother still teaches piano) a far better artist than me and much better at math.

Having had many of the same formative experiences, I guess I shouldn't have been surprised that Nathan and I emerged into adulthood with similar musical tastes. When we were just out of high school, both Nathan and I gravitated towards the late '80s-early '90s synth pop electronic sound.

By the early '90s, Nathan and I had both ended up as undergraduates at the University of Texas. I was in the philosophy department, while he was in the engineering program.

While we were in school, Depeche Mode played a midweek concert in Houston, and we both decided that it was a show we had to see. (We might have told our parents that we would actually die if we didn't get to go.) That tour was not coming to Austin.

While it seems incredible now, our parents made it possible for Nathan and I to fly down together for the show, so as not to miss any classes. While Nathan had driven all over the country with his parents when he was growing up, it was his first plane trip. On the way there, he was busy calculating the airspeed of the plane in his head.

We went to the Depeche Mode show at the Woodlands with a bunch of other people that we both knew, then flew home early the next morning so that we could both get to class. The whole excursion was clearly an extravagance, and one I doubt either of us would have been permitted if the other hadn't wanted or been able to go.

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Every year at Christmas when I see Nathan, one of the first questions he asks me is, “So, what bands are you listening to?”

That’s good, because I can’t talk about Longhorn football, or the stock market or politics with him. I don’t know anything about football or the stock market — and discussing our different politics near to the freshly sharpened knives might be a poor choice for making the right Christmas memories for the million kids in our extended family.

The older I get, the more I realize that growing up with a large extended family that I had a chance to really get to know might be the greatest asset that I could have been blessed with.

Nathan grew up to be a busy corporate executive with an MBA, while I grew up to be “artistic”

Yet if I’m lucky enough to get into the Depeche Mode panel and show during SXSW, my first thoughts will likely be about how much he’d enjoy being there as well.

Blood might be thicker than water, but it’s stronger when you add a little vintage synth-pop.



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